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ABSTRACT

A format is drawn for planning, writing, and assessing a collaborative research proposal. A description is given of the essential sections of a research proposal, and a brief explanation of each is provided. A suggested evaluation procedure is included to use for evaluating and ranking each proposal against established, published standards. These standards are pointed out as useful as proposal development guidelines. A proposal format is included with an informative outline for the contents of each page. (JD)

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Planning Jointly for Classroom Research

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THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL

The purpose for this paper is to define a format for planning, writing, and assessing a collaborative research proposal to be supported by college faculty and public school educational personnel. There are traditional rules to follow when planning and writing a research proposal. None of the procedures suggested here are new, and they follow traditional patterns of inquiry. What is unique in this paper is the application of standards to proposals that are related to Teacher Corps objectives, local school objectives, and collaborative research objectives. These standards should help researchers steer their proposal development efforts so that proposals submitted for research using these guidelines have immediate face validity to national, regional, and local Teacher Corps personnel and to local school personnel.

Collaborative research efforts should begin by each member of the team assessing the costs to herself or himself for participating in the study. Important questions to consider are:

1. What is in this study for me? (What do I personally stand to gain for participating, e.g., knowledge, fame, wealth, etc.?)
2. Does the topic suit my personal or professional interests?
3. What skills, time, and resources can I personally commit?
4. Are my necessary commitments and related responsibilities balanced by benefits I will gain through participating?
5. What role or responsibilities do I have in the study?

6. What responsibilities do I have to other members of the research team?

If each member of a research team can answer these questions positively for herself or himself and for other members of the team, as they relate to either a specific research proposal or simply a commitment to research together in a general area, then there is reason to believe that the team can be successful. Once there is a commitment to work together, the team must identify a potential research study of some identified benefit to all members of the team and prepare a research proposal.

Why should a team of researchers spend their time preparing a formal research proposal? There are several good reasons. Conducting research studies requires a great deal of human and support resources. Studies that are well conceived, relevant, and have great impact potential on school or college practices usually cost no more than poorly conceived ones. A second important reason is that teaming for research requires good communication among research team members regarding what to expect, what is happening, and what happened. Clear communication, clarification, and negotiations about intentions and expectations for a study will enhance the potential for it to affect members of the research team and their organizations. Another reason is that conducting good research requires practice. First attempts at research using new techniques or new target groups often lead to frustrations, new experiences, and unanticipated, unexplainable results. First attempts usually become pilot studies instead of generalizable research, because the researchers did not adequately anticipate what would happen. A well developed proposal will reduce the potential for project abortion. If a proposal has basic weaknesses, it is better to discover them at the proposal stage than at the dissemination stage.

There are three major sections included in this paper. The first contains a description of each of the five sections of a research proposal and a brief explanation for each. The second section contains a suggested proposal format to use when writing the proposal for team critiques or for Network selection. The last part includes a suggested evaluation procedure to use for evaluating and ranking each proposal against established, published standards. These standards should not only be used to evaluate each proposal, but should be used by the research team as proposal development guidelines.

The Research Proposal

There are six major sections of the research proposal. They are:

1. The abstract
2. The introduction, background of the problem, and statement of purpose
3. The method
4. Administration plans
5. References
6. Appendices

The first three sections should take no more than eight to twelve double spaced pages of text. The following text describes material that should be included in these six sections.

The Abstract

The abstract should be contained on one page. The top portion should identify the Teacher Corps project proposing the study; the research team members, and their regular employment roles, e.g., college faculty, classroom teacher; the target group for the study and the title.

The bottom two-thirds of the page should contain a brief three paragraph (150 words maximum) overview of the proposed study. The first paragraph should include a statement of the general problem area and specific questions to be investigated. The second paragraph should contain a summary statement about the target group (number and location), data collection techniques used (treatments, observations, etc.), and procedures used to summarize and interpret information collected (descriptive, comparative, causal, correlational, etc.). The third paragraph should contain a statement of potential impact on groups within organizations and organizations as a whole for knowledge gained as a result of the study. This third paragraph should be carefully conceptualized and written. It should summarize the total, "So what?" statement of your study and justify the possible inconvenience brought about in implementing the study and the resources used to conduct it.

Introduction

The introductory section of your proposal should make it clear to the critic and all other readers what is intended and why. It includes the rationale and purpose for the study. It should not take more than one-half of all the pages you have allowed for sections two and three of the proposal. This first section should include:

1. A general statement of what the study is about
2. A summary statement of need or importance for the study
3. A review of the literature
4. A clear, brief statement of the problem addressed
5. A statement of the hypotheses, however formal
6. A definition of specific terms used in the proposal

Though most of these sections are self-explanatory, a few suggestions

for limiting the literature review may be helpful. If you consider the variables you are going to study, and variables you predict may affect the one(s) you will study, you can limit your literature and focus only on the primary and interrelated variables. What will be your dependent variable(s) and measure for them (target group behavior or attitude that you are observing)? There are three groups of independent variables that may affect your groups' performance or attitudes (dependent variable). They include target group characteristics, task characteristics, and environmental characteristics. If you predict that group age, achievement, attendance or other group characteristics will affect your target groups' behavior or attitude on the variable of interest, then you should look for studies or theory that attempt to explain your predicted relationship. Likewise, the length of the task, the number of tasks to be performed, or the intrinsic motivational nature of the task may logically cause you to predict that the factor will affect the groups' performance on the task. If this is so, then literature should be included that will provide insight into the predicted relationship. Literature should be included on environmental factors that may influence your results. The time of day, number in the group, proximity of others, age of group leader, or classroom arrangement may be expected to influence how the group behaves on a given task.

By carefully analyzing the dependent variable of interest and independent variables that you predict could influence it, you can focus your literature review and summary on only those theories and studies that are relevant to these limited variables.

Since your space has been limited to a few pages, you must be brief but clear in the introductory section. Do not include large, irrelevant need statements or literature that does not directly relate to your

problem, target groups, or variables under study. Be conservative.

The Method

The third section of the proposal should describe to the reader exactly what you intend to do, to whom and with what. It should again be a brief summary and take no more than one quarter to one third of your total number of pages for the second and third sections of the proposal. Topics explained in the methods section should include subjects or target group, materials and equipment used, and implementation procedures.

Sample

Information included should be: (a) the total number of persons participating in the group studied; (b) the general characteristics of the group; (c) how subgroups, if used, were determined; (d) how individuals were assigned to groups; (e) whether anyone who logically would have been included in the study was not, and, why not.

Materials

Were materials selected or produced to be used in the study to either give groups instructions/directions, present information, or guide them in their task? Were materials selected or developed to collect or record data gathered about the groups' behavior or performance? The nature of these materials should be described in this section. Materials that can easily be attached to the proposal can be referred to in the text and then included in the appendix. A description of procedures used to establish reliability and validity of data collection instruments should be briefly described.

Procedures

The description of procedures should include a summary of all procedures used to carry out the study. All the general tasks required to conduct the study, and the sequence of tasks, and how the tasks will be carried out should be described. General areas to include in this section are:

1. Preparation for implementing study
2. Introduction, orientation, training of relevant groups
3. Practice, trials (if used)
4. Implementation
5. Data collection and recording procedures
6. Data summary and analysis techniques

After reading the procedures section, the critics should have a clear idea of the exact nature of your study, the scope of your study, and the relevance of your study and procedures to the research question posed in the introductory section. They also should be able to determine, at face value, the relevance of the study for each member of the team, for Teacher Corps, and for the school.

Administration Plans

The administration plans you present should demonstrate the exact tasks to be performed, by whom, and when. By reading this section critics should be able to determine the role and responsibilities for each member of the collaborative research team. True collaboration and assignment according to skill, time, resources, and logic can be detected. Resources to be used in conducting the study should be presented. It is often most efficient to present the administrative information in tabular form.

References

All studies and materials sited in the body of the proposal should be listed alphabetically on the reference page. Do not bother to list anything there that is not directly cited in the body of the proposal.

Appendix

The appendix section should not include irrelevant support material. Only material related to your treatment, data collection, or data summary procedures should be included. If there are school site or district regulations about conducting studies in the school, an approval for the study by the formal review committee would be a helpful addition in this section.

THE PROPOSAL FORMAT

The following pages include a suggested format to be used in submitting jointly planned research proposals to the Network. Each page includes the format and heading.

INTRODUCTION

Nature of Study

Need for Study

Literature

(Expand this section to as many pages, two to four, as necessary to clearly summarize literature related to each independent and dependent variabie).

Problem Statement

Hypotheses

Definition of Terms

Limitations of Study

METHOD

Sample

Materials

(Expand this section to two pages if necessary. Remember to use the Appendix for supporting documentation when relevant.)

Procedures

(Expand this section to two pages if necessary.)

ADMINISTRATION PLANS

Table 1

Task and Personnel Analysis

Task	Responsible Personnel	Employer IHE	Employer LEA
A. Identify broad problem area			
B. Select partner.			
C. Refine problem area to suit partners			
D. Determine benefits of study and role for each partner			
E. Determine tasks and timeline for each member for proposal preparation.			
F. Draft proposal.			
G. Critique draft.			
H. Revise proposal			
I. Submit proposal to school review committee for approval.			
J. Submit proposal to Network for review.			
K. Negotiate proposal/resources. . . .			
L. Determine tasks for each member for project implementation. . . .			
M. Complete study orientation for invested groups			
N. Implement study			

Table 1

(continued)

Task	Responsible Personnel	Employer IHE	Employer LEA
O. Collect data.			
P. Summarize/analyze data.			
Q. Discuss/interpret data.			
R. Determine whether to repeat all or part of study.			
S. Plan dissemination strategy			
T. Determine dissemination tasks for each member			
U. Draft reports/speeches/ articles.			
V. Review and revise reports/ speeches/articles			
W. Disseminate information			
X.			
Y.			
Z.			

Table 2

Timelines

(Add Letter for Each Task and Block Out Appropriate Time)

1979-80

Insert task letter from Table 1	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun

(Add a new page for 1980-81 and additional years if appropriate).

Table 3

Resources

Task from Table 1	Nature of Resource	Cost to Project	Cost to Network
A.			
B.			
C.			
D.			
E.			
F.			
G.			
H.			
I.			
J.			
K.			
L.			
M.			
N.			
O.			
P.			
Q.			
R.			
S.			
T.			

Table 3

(continued)

Task from Table 1	Nature of Resource	Cost to Project	Cost to Network
U.			
V.			
W.			
X.			
Y.			
Z.			
	Total Resources Requested	$	$
		Project	Network

THE PROPOSAL EVALUATION PROCEDURES

Proposals should be evaluated using three basic categories of standards:

1. The merit of the proposal for the research outlined.
2. The degree to which the proposal demonstrates logical collaboration among research team members.
3. The degree to which the proposed research meets:
   (a) each team members personal goals,
   (b) Teacher Corps goals,
   (c) the IHE goals, and
   (d) the school's goals.

Each section of the proposal should demonstrate the merit of the proposal in each of these categories. The following evaluation form can be used to assess each proposal based on the standards. When proposal points are tallied, all proposals submitted can be ranked.

Total Points_____

Title of Proposal_____

Project_____

Teacher Corps
Goal Addressed:

Community_____ Demonstration_____

Student learning_____ Institutionalization_____

Teaching methods_____ School climate_____

Better preservice/
inservice programs_____ Multicultural education_____

Area:

_____Administration procedures

_____Collaboration procedures

_____Instructional procedures

_____Other_____

I. Abstract (Total 10 points). . . . . _____

Problem statement clear
Problem relevant to the schools
Procedures well summarized
Impact statement relevant to Teacher Corps,
IHE, or school

Total points
for I

II. Introduction (Total 100 points). . . . . _____

Nature and need for study (10 pts.) _____
Literature review (10 pts.) _____
Problem statement/hypotheses (10 pts.)_____
Definitions/limitations (10 pts.)_____
Parallelity among need, literature,
variables, problem statement, and
hypotheses (10 pts.)_____
Relevance of proposed study to Teacher
Corps priorities (50 pts.)_____

Total points
for II

III. Method (Total 70 points). . . . . _____

Sample Description (5 pts.)_____
Design procedure (10 pts.)_____

Total points
for III

Group definition and individual
assignment into groups (10 pts.)_____
Materials development/selection (10 pts.)_____
Procedures
Orientation (5 pts.)_____
Implementation (5 pts.)_____
Data collection (5 pts.)_____
Data analysis (10 pts.)_____
Appropriate procedures for all
group members (10 pts.)_____

IV. Administration Plans (Total 65 points). . . . . _____

Task and Personnel Analysis
Personnel assignments demonstrate
team collaboration between IHE
and LEA personnel (40 pts.)_____

Total points
for IV

Time allotted appears feasible (10 pts.)_____

Resources appear to be related to tasks
and justifiable (15 pts.)_____

Total proposal points _____